CHAPTER IV

THE VED1C CONCEPTION OF GOD

In this chapter, we propose to throw some light on the Vedic conception of God. The Vedas teach the worship of One God who is Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent Lord of the universe. The Vedic conception of God put in a nutshell is expressed clearly in the following well-known verse of the Yajur Veda 40-8.

स पर्य्यगाच्छुक्रमकायमव्रणमास्नाविरँ शुद्धमपापविद्धम् । कविर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयम्भूर्याथातथ्यतोऽर्थान् व्यदधाच्छाश्वतीभ्यः समाभ्यः॥ यजु० ४०.८॥

It means........

God is All-pervading, Radiant and formless, free from physical wound as He is without sinews, most Holy, Unpierced by any sin. Omniscient, Knower of the mind of all, All conquering and Self-existent. .He has created the objects of the world for His eternal subects (immortal souls).

According to the Vedas, such an Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient God is One and He alone is to be worshipped by all with pure heart and noble deeds.

The Vedas declare......

य एक इत्तमु ष्टुहि कृष्टीनां विचर्षणिः।
पतिर्जज्ञे वृषक्रतुः॥ ऋग्० ६.४८.१६॥

O man ! Praise God who is One and One only and who is the Omniscient and Omnipotent Lord of all beings.

एक एव नमस्यो विक्ष्वीड्यः॥ अथर्व० २.२.१॥

One God alone is to be worshipped by all people. He is Adorable.

एक एव नमस्यः सुशेवाः॥ अथर्व० २.२.२॥

One God alone who is the Giver of true happiness and bliss is to be worshipped by all.

It is true that some scholars maintain that the Vedas enjoin upon us the worship of many Gods such as Indra, Agni, Mitra, Varuna etc. But their idea is entirely wrong. In the Vedas, Agni, Mitra, Varuna, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and other words of this type are principally used for God. For instance, we are expressly told in the Rigveda—

इन्द्र मित्रं वरुणमग्निमाहुरथो दिव्यः स सुपर्णो गरुत्मान्।
एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्त्यग्निं यमं मातरिश्वानमाहुः॥ ऋ० १.१६४.४६॥

i. e. That Supreme Spirit is the Protector of all and He pervades and gives light to all bright things. He is called Indra or the Glorious, Mitra or the Friendly. Varuna or the Greatest and the best, Agni or Adorable. Though One, He is called by the wise, by many names such as Agni (The Adorable) Yama (The Ruler or Controller) Matarishva or the Mighty.

In another part of the same Veda we find......

सुपर्णं विप्राः कवयो वचोभिरेकं सन्तं बहुधा कल्पयन्ति॥
ऋ० १०.११४.५॥

The learned and the wise describe the One existing God in many forms of expressions.

In the Rig Veda 10.82.3 the idea of one God is put in the following manner:—

यो न पिता जनिता यो विधाता, धामानि वेद भुवनानि विश्वा।
यो देवाना नामधा एक एव तं संप्रश्नं भुवना यन्त्यन्या॥ ऋ० १०.८२.३॥

Our Father who is the All-creating God and Who is (he disposer, knoweth all the worlds and all things existing; He is the only One Reality, the

name giver of all the devas - shining objects. Him alone all other beings attain (for) He is the only one solution of all our interrogations. Rig 10.82.3

The Omnipresence and Omnipotence of God has been described poetically in the Vedas as follows —

विश्वतश्चक्षुरुत विश्वतोमुखो विश्वतो बाहुरुत विश्वतस्पात्।

सं बाहुभ्यां धमति सं पतत्रैर्द्यावाभूमी जनयन्देव एकः॥ ऋ० १०.८१.३॥

"He whose eyes are everywhere, Whose mouth is in all sides. Whose arms are all around and Whose feet are in all directions is the only One Divine Being who has created the heaven and the earth and by means of His all-spreading arms, He infuses life into all beings.

The Oneness of God is explicitly described in the following, besides thousands of Mantras of the same kind.

य एक इद्विदयते वसु मर्ताय दाशुषे।
ईशानो अप्रतिष्कुतं इन्द्रो अङ्ग॥ ऋ० १.८४.७। साम० ३८६।

O. friend ! Indra (God of Supreme Power) is the only Ruler of resistless authority Who bestoweth wealth on the gift - offering liberal mortal.

प्रजापते न त्वदेतान्यन्यो विश्वा जातानि परि ता बभूव।
यत्कामास्ते जुहुमस्तन्नो अस्तु वयं स्याम पतयो रयीणाम्॥
ऋ० १०.१२१.१०॥

O Lord of all creatures, no other than Thou can control and govern all these created things. May the things desiring which we pray to Thee, be ours. May we be lords of all good wealth (material as well spiritual).

न द्वितीयो न तृतीयश्चतुर्थो नाप्युच्यते॥१६॥

न पंचमो न षष्ठः सप्तमो नाप्युच्यते॥१७॥

नाष्टमो न नवमो दशमो नाप्युच्यते॥१९॥
.... स एष एक वृदेक एव॥ अथर्व १३.४.२०॥
सर्वे अस्मिन् देवा एकवृतो भवन्ति॥२१॥

He (God) is called neither the second, nor the third nor yet the fourth. He is called neither the fifth, nor the sixth, nor yet the seventh.

He is called neither the eighth, not the ninth nor yet the tenth.

He takes care of all that breathes and of all that does not breathe. He has got all this conquering power. He is the One, One alone and only One.

All these luminous forces of nature become one in Him. Atharva XII 4. 19-21.

How emphatically the Unity of God is asserted in such passages and how absurd and false is the view advocated by some prejudiced Western Scholars that Vedas teach polytheism. Besides prejudice, it is also due to ignorance of the real meaning of the word "Dcva" that this misconception about the Vedic idea of God has sprung up. It is generally translated by the Western scholars as God and as 33 devas are mentioned in some Vedic hymns. It is supposed that the Vedas teach the worship of these 33 Devas or Gods. As a matter of fact, the word देव (Deva) is derived from the root Divu दिवु which has got ten meanings.

दिवु क्रीडाविजिगीषाव्यवहारद्युतिस्तुतिमोदमदस्वप्नकान्तिगतिषु॥ धातुपाठे॥

It means Deva is used in the sense of sporting, desire to conquer, pursuit, brilliancy, praise, pleasure, exhilaration, sleep, knowledge, motion and acquisition.

As such, it is an epithet applied to the sun, the moon and other forces of nature life fire, wind etc.

Yaskacharya, the celebrated author of the Vedic Philology (Nirukta) interprets the word "Deva" as follows —

देवो दानाद्वा दीपनाद्वा द्योतनाद्वा द्युस्थानो भवतीति वा। निरुक्ते ७.१६॥

That which confers some advantages upon us, can illuminate things i.e. explain or throw light upon them and that which is the source of light is "Deva."

It is therefore entirely wrong to translate the word "deva" everywhere as God. It may be used for all brilliant and useful objects as well as learned man of truthful nature.

सत्यसंहिता वै देवाः॥ ऐतरेय ब्राह्मण १.६॥

विद्वांसो हि देवाः॥ शतपथ ३.७.३.१०॥

By 33 devas mentioned in the Vedas are not meant 33 Gods as misinterpreted by some eastern and western scholars, but the following objects according to the Shatapath Brahman which contains exposition of the Yajurveda mantras —

कतमे ते त्रयस्त्रिंशत् इति अष्टौ वसवः। एकादश रुद्रा द्वादशादित्याः त एकत्रिंशत् इन्द्रश्चैव प्रजापतिश्च त्रयस्त्रिंशाविति॥ कतमे वसव इति। अग्निश्च पृथिवी च वायुश्चान्तरिक्षं चादित्यश्च द्यौश्च चन्द्रमाश्च नक्षत्राणि चैते वसव एतेषु हीद सर्वे वसु हितम् एते हीदं सर्वे वासयन्ते तद्यदिदं सर्वं वासयन्ते तस्माद् वसव इति। कतमे रुद्रा इति। दशेमे प्राणा आत्मैकादशः ते यदास्मात् मर्त्याच्छरीरादुत्क्रामन्ति अथ रोदयन्ति तद् यद् रोदयन्ति तस्माद् रुद्रा इति। कतम आदित्याः इति। द्वादशमासाः सम्वत्सरस्य एत आदित्याः एते हीदं सर्वमाददानायन्ति तद्यदिदं सर्वमाददाना यन्ति तस्मादादित्या इति। कतम इन्द्रः कतमः प्रजापतिरिति। स्तनयित्नुरेवेदन्द्रो यज्ञः प्रजापतिरिति। कतम एको देव इति स ब्रह्म त्यदित्याचक्षते। शतपथ १४.१६॥

The meaning of the above is......

There are 33 devas which manifest the glory of God, 8 Vasus, 11 Rudras, 12 Adityas, Indra and Prajapati, 33 on the whole. The eight Vasus (I) Heated consmic bodies, (2) Planets (3) Atmospheres (4) Supertcrrestrial space (5) Suns (6) Rays of ethcral space (7) Satellites (8) Stars.

These are called Vasus (abodes) for the whole group of existences resides in them, for they are abodes of all that lives, moves or exists.

The eleven Rudras are the ten pranas (nervauric forces or vital airs) enlivening the human frame and the eleventh is Aatma (the human spirit).

These are called the Rudras (from root rud to weep) because when they desert the body, it becomes dead and the relations of the dead begin to weep.

The 12 Adityas are the twelve solar months, marking the course of time. They are called Adityas as by their cyclic motion, they produce changes in all objects and hence lapse of the term of existence for each object.

Indra is the all-pervading electricity or force. Prajapati is Yajna (or an active voluntary association of objects on the part of man for the purpose of art or association with other men for purpose of teaching or learning) God is the One Deva Who is Adorable. According to the Vedas, God is the Supreme Lord of all the devas. The Vedas tell us expressly.

आपो ह यद्बृहतीर्विश्वमायन्गार्भं दधाना जनयन्तीरग्निम्।
ततो देवानां समवर्ततासुरेकः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम॥
ऋ० १०.१२१.७॥

यश्चिदापो महिना पर्यपश्यद्दक्षं दधाना जनयन्तीर्यज्ञम्॥
ऋ० १०.१२१.८॥

When this vast diffused matter producing an igneous condition and holding in its womb this universe, manifested itself, then He was the One life of all shining beings; He it is to Whom we shall offer our prayers. (Rig. 10.121.7)

He who with His greatness looked on that diffused Matter possessed of heat and energy and producing the cosmos, Who is the One Supreme Lord (Adhi Deva) of bright things (devas). He it in to whom we shall offer our prayers.

In the Rigveda 8.1.1 and Sama Veda 342. we find the Vedic injunction:—

मा चिदन्यद्वि शंसत सखायोमा रिष्यण्त।
इन्द्र मित्स्तोता वृषणं सचा सुते मुहुरुक्था च शंसत॥ ऋ० ८.१.१॥

O ye friends : do not glorify any other being than God so that sorrows and sufferings may not trouble you. Eulogies Indra-God of Supreme Power alone Who is the showerer of all blessings and repeatedly pronounce the sacted hymns together in all your congregations. (Rig. VIII 1-1)

In the Rigveda I 164.20 the relation between God and Soul and their separate existence is expressed in the following poetical words—

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्ष परि षस्वजाते।
तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्त्यनश्नन्नन्यो अभि चाकशीति॥ ऋ० १.१६०.२०॥

Two co-eternal spirits reside in the equally eternal matter, like two co-eval and friendly birds perching on the same tree. One of these two (viz. the finite soul) tastes of the fruit of this tree (i.e. feels pleasure and pain which are incidental to the soul's union with matter or its circumscription with a body) while the other (viz. Infinite Soul or God)

watches or supervises without being subject to its joys and sorrows. It is thus clear that the Vedas advocate neither polytheism nor henotheism or pantheism. It is Monotheism of the purest type that is taught by the Vedas. The Vedic conception of God has been clearly expressed by Maharshi

Dayananda Sarasvati - the greatest sage and Vedic scholar of the age as follows—

God is Truth and Happiness itself. Formless, Almighty, Just, Merciful, Unbegotten, Infinite, Immutable, without beginning, Incomparable, All-supporting, the Lord of All, All pervading, Omniscient, Imperishable, Immortal, Fearless, Eternal, Holy and the efficient cause of the universe.

To him alone worship is due: This is quite in keeping with the scientific conception of God as expressed by Sir Issac Newton, the father of Modern science in the following terms—

"These things being rightly despatched does it not appear from phenomena that there is a Supreme Being in-corporeal, living, Intelligent, Omnipresent, who in infinite space sees the things themselves intimately and thoroughly, perceives them and comprehends them wholly by their immediate presence to Himself." (Opticks by Sir Newton P. 344)

Impartial Great Scholars on the Vedic Conception of God

Many impartial great scholars of all countries and nations have clearly admitted that the Vedas teach pure Monotheism. The following are some extracts from their writings:—

(1) Shri F. Dadachanji B. A., LL. B., The renowned Parsi

Scholar in his well known book entitled 'Philosophy of Zoroastrianism and Comparative Study of Religions" has clearly and most unambiguously stated—

"The Vedas teach nothing but monotheism of the purest kind." P' 100

A Muslim Scholar's Views—

Sir Yamin Khan Ki. C. I. E. Ex. Member - of the Central Assembly in the Pre-independence days writes in his known work named "God, Soul and Universe in Science and Islam."

"Originally the conception of God among the Hindus was right, when they believed Him to be Unit and Omnipresent, but when they started dividing Him into different shapes according to different functions which they considered He performed, they strayed far from their original conception. The result was that many who were heroes in their life time, were gradually turned into incarnations of God and idolatry increased." Chap. 1 P. 3)

"Many Hindus believe that all their sins are washed away by having a dip in the holy water of the Ganges. Thus it is seen that the great philosophical religion which conceived Unity of God in the beginning, brought up corruption and degradation of high ideas, when His attributes as the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer were divided and allotted to different deities possessing separate entities in different forms.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati a man of great learning started preaching the old Religion of the Vedas which conceived Unity of God.

("God, Soul and Universe in Science and Islam by Sir Mohammed Yamin Khan, P. 3).

Some Western Scholars on the subject—

Mr. Schlegel - a famous German philosopher writes thus in the "Wisdom of the Ancient Hindus."

"It cannot be denied that the early Indians possessed a knowledge of the true God. All their writings are replete with sentiments and expressions noble, clear, lovely, grand, as deeply conceived as in any human language in which men have spoken of their God." (Wisdom of the Ancient Indians by Schlegel).

Mr. Charles Coleman—

Mr. Charles Coleman an English Scholar has written as follows regarding the Vedic Conception of God — "The Al-mighty, Infinite, Eternal, Incomprehensible, Self-existent Being, He who sees everything through never seen is Brahma, One un-known True Being, the Creator, the Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe."

Count Bjarnstjerne's Views —

Coiirit Bjarhstjerne - a Russian Scholar Wrote thus in this illustrious work named "Theogohy of the Hindus" P. 53 after giving a few quotations from the Vedas—

"These sublime ideas cannot fail to convince us that the Vedas recognise only One God who is Almighty, Infinite, Eternal, Self existent, the Light and Lord of the Universe."

Mr. Ernest Wood's views—

Mr. Ernest Wood an English Scholar in his famous book entitled "An English Man defends Mother India." has stated as follows on the subject we are dealing with 'In the eyes of Hindus, there is but One God. This was stated long ago in the Rigveda in the following Words—

एकं सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति।

Which may be translated as “The sages name the One Being variously.”

Prof. Maxmuller’s Views—

Prof. Maxmullar admitted in his last work (though he did not admit that before) “That the conception had been formed (in the Vedic period) that there is but One, One Being neither male nor female, a being raised high above all the conditions and limitations of personality and of human nature and nevertheless the Being that was really meant by all such names as Indra, Agni, Matarishvan and by the name Prajapati - Lord of creatures.”

Referring to several hymns of the Vedas, Prof. Maxmuller remarked in his “History of Sanskrit Literature” “I add only one more hymn, (Rig. 10.121) in which the Idea of One God is expressed with such power and decision, that it will make us hesitate before we deny to the Aryan nation an instinctive monotheism.”

Thus it is clear that the Vedas teach the worship of One God and their conception of God is most rational and scientific.